

Message Text

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63

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-25 SAJ-01 OMB-01 IO-14 NEA-14

CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04

RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 /146 W

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3656

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

SECDEF WASHDC

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 4527

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, XO, UN, AS, US

SUBJECT: US MILITARY AIRCRAFT USE OF COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS

REF: A) CANBERRA 3073; B) USUN 1843

1. SUMMARY: TWO NEWS ARTICLES IN AUSTRALIAN PAPERS JULY 15-16, HAVE FOCUSSED ATTENTION UPON REPORTED THAI DECISION TO BAN US MILITARY AIRCRAFT FROM USING THAI AIR BASES FOR SURVEILLANCE OPERATIONS IN INDIAN OCEAN. ORIGINAL STORY CAME FROM MICHAEL RICHARDSON, DATE LINE SINGAPORE, IN WHICH HE DESCRIBED THAI DECISION AS "MAJOR SETBACK" FOR AMERICAN PLANS TO MONITOR SOVIET NAVAL ACTIVITIES. SECOND ARTICLE QUOTES DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS REPRESENTATIVE IN CANBERRA AS CONFIRMING AUSTRALIAN PERMISSION FOR US AND OTHER FRIENDLY MILITARY AIRCRAFT TO USE COCOS ISLAND AIRFIELD FOR RECONNAISSANCE, TRAINING, AND SUPPLY FLIGHTS. US OPERATIONS ARE DESCRIBED AS "ENVIRONMENTAL RECONNAISSANCE AND TRAINING" FLIGHTS. EMBASSY INFORMED THAT OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN HAS QUESTION ON NOTICE BEFORE PARLIAMENT

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INQUIRING INTO NON-AUSTRALIAN MILITARY AIRCRAFT USE OF COCOS

AND THAT SAME QUESTION LIKELY TO BE RAISED IN PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE LATE AFTERNOON JULY 16. DFA RESPONSE TO REPORTERS QUESTIONS STATES THAT PERMISSION FOR SUCH USE OF COCOS IS CONSISTENT WITH AUSTRALIA'S CONCERN FOR PEACE AND STABILITY OF THE INDIAN OCEAN. END SUMMARY.

2. IN STORY ON FRONT PAGE OF AUSTRALIAN AGE JULY 15, MICHAEL RICHARDSON ARTICLE FROM SINGAPORE STATES THAT THAI GOVERNMENT HAS BANNED US MILITARY AIRCRAFT FROM FLYING INDIAN OCEAN PATROLS USING AIR BASES IN THAILAND. RICHARDSON STATES DECISION IS "MAJOR SETBACK" FOR AMERICAN PLANS TO MONITOR SOVIET NAVAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIAN OCEAN. HE GOES ON TO COMPARE REPORTED THAI DECISION TO AUSTRALIAN APPROVAL WITH AUSTRALIAN PERMISSION FOR US MILITARY AIRCRAFT TO USE AIRFIELD IN COCOS ISLANDS TO SUPPORT US SURVEILLANCE FLIGHTS IN INDIAN OCEAN.

3. FOLLOW-UP ARTICLE IN AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPER JULY 16 REFERS TO DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, CANBERRA, CONFIRMATION THAT US MILITARY AIRCRAFT ALONG WITH AIRCRAFT OF SEVERAL FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS MAKE USE OF NON-MILITARY AIRFIELD AT COCOS PERIODICALLY AS STAGING POINT FOR RECONNAISSANCE, TRAINING AND SUPPLY FLIGHTS. ARTICLE GOES ON TO CONTRAST AUSTRALIAN PERMISSION FOR THESE FLIGHTS WITH PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM'S SUPPORT FOR A ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. DFA REPRESENTATIVE IS FURTHER QUOTED AS SAYING THAT THESE SURVEILLANCE FLIGHTS ARE CONSISTENT WITH AUSTRALIA'S CONCERN FOR PEACE AND STABILITY OF THE INDIAN OCEAN.

4. IN CONVERSATION WITH DFA PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER JULY 15, HE ACKNOWLEDGED ACCURACY OF SECOND ARTICLE NOTED ABOVE IN PROVIDING THE SENSE OF AUSTRALIA'S POSITION ON MILITARY AIRCRAFT USE OF COCOS AT PRESENT TIME. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT ARTICLE HAD NEGLECTED TO REFLECT IN FULL FOLLOWING STATEMENT WHICH WAS GIVEN TO REPORTER OVER THE TELEPHONE: QTE IT IS CONSISTENT

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WITH AUSTRALIA'S CONCERN FOR THE PEACE AND STABILITY OF THE INDIAN OCEAN TO PROVIDE A FACILITY WHICH HELPS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE RECONNAISSANCE AND SURVEILLANCE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN, THE NEED FOR WHICH WOULD BE HEIGHTENED EVEN MORE BY THE ACHIEVEMENT OF A ZONE OF PEACE AND NEUTRALITY. END QTE. POINT MADE BY DFA OFFICER IS OF COURSE THAT USE OF COCOS FOR RECONNAISSANCE AND SURVEILLANCE FLIGHTS COULD CONTRIBUTE TO MONITORING

OF ZONE OF PEACE AND NEUTRALITY ONCE THAT IS ACHIEVED.

5. IN SEPARATE CONVERSATION WITH FIRST ASST SECRETARY KEN ROGERS, DEFENSE POLICY BRANCH, DFA, EMBOFF ASKED WHETHER IT WAS CORRECT TO ASSUME THAT PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM AGREED THAT ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY IN INDIAN OCEAN IS LONG-RANGE GOAL AND WAS NOT "JUST AROUND THE CORNER" AS IMPLIED BY WHITLAM'S STATEMENTS SOME MONTHS AGO. ROGERS INDICATED HE BELIEVED THAT WHITLAM NOW ACCEPTED ONG-RANGE NATURE OF THIS CONCEPT.

6. PUBLIC AFFAIRS REP AT DFA TOLD EMBOFF THAT OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN HAS POSED PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION WITH REGARD TO USE OF COCOS BY NON-AUSTRALIAN MILITARY AIRCRAFT. DFA HAS PROVIDED TO PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE PROPOSED RESPONSE WHICH SUPPORTS AUSTRALIA'S CONTINUED AGREEMENT TO US AND OTHER MILITARY AIRCRAFT USE OF COCOS IN CONTEXT OF RECONNAISSANCE, TRAINING AND SUPPLY FLIGHTS. US MILITARY FLIGHTS ARE DESCRIBED AS FOR "ENVIRONMENTAL RECONNAISSANCE AND TRAINING." DFA REP WAS QUICK TO ADD, HOWEVER, THAT THIS PROPOSED ANSWER MIGHT BE AMENDED OR NOT BY PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE BEFORE RESPONSE IS GIVEN TO QUESTION IN PARLIAMENT. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM WILL BE ASKED QUESTION DURING HIS REGULAR PRESS CONFERENCE SCHEDULED LATE AFTERNOON JULY 16.

7 BOTH PRESS STORIES NOTED ABOVE MENTION FORTHCOMING VISIT OF COMMITTEE OF 24 TO COCOS IN AUGUST ON INVITATION OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT. THESE STORIES POINTED OUT THAT UN VISITING MISSION IS EXPECTED TO RECOMMEND GREATER SELF-GOVERNMENT FOR COCOS ISLANDS BUT WOULD BE CONFIDENTIAL

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FALL SHORT OF RECOMMENDING INDEPENDENCE.

8. COMMENT: EMBASSY WILL REPORT SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS ON SUBJECT AS THEY OCCUR. IN MEANTIME, WE WOULD APPRECIATE INFORMATION ON REPORTED THAI DECISION TO BAN US AIRCRAFT FROM USING THAI BASES FOR SURVEILLANCE OPERATIONS IN INDIAN OCEAN. WE WOULD ALSO APPRECIATE RECEIVING INFORMATION COPIES OF MESSAGES ON THIS SUBJECT BETWEEN BANGKOK AND WASHINGTON FOR OUR INFORMATION.
GREEN

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